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Sociocultural Risk and Opportunity

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Who is on my side? Who?

II Kings, 9:32

Some children have everything going for them. Others face a hostile world alone. Under optimal conditions, the child grows up in a loving and supportive family and a stable, supporting community. Chapter 3 enlarges on the human ecosystem framework set out in the previous chapter by exploring risks and opportunities that affect development at each level of the human environment. We describe the benefits and dangers that can come to the child from family, community, political and economic decisions, and finally from the culture as a whole. Given our professional interests, we give special attention to recent patterns affecting children and families.

The ecological perspective not only seeks to describe and explain the effect of ecosystems on the individual, but also to help make the world a better place for children and families. Therefore, it takes a stand on the positive or negative impact of the social environment. This combination of moral and scientific elements is a powerful tool for the social scientist, service worker, or policymaker.

The Meaning of Risk: Case Studies

Sociocultural risk refers to the impoverishing of the child's world so that the child lacks the basic social and psychological necessities of life. Children who grow up wanting for food, for affection, for caring teachers, for good medical care, and for values consistent with intellectual progress and social competence grow up less well than those children

who do not lack these things. Their absence places a child "at risk" for impaired development.

This simple truth is the beginning of our story: Children need loving care if they are to grow and develop normally. The sad fact is that some children are deprived of these basic necessities. They are starved physically and psychologically. Why? How do we make sense of a world that places children in jeopardy? It is not easy to understand the complicated chain of events that results in a child's basic needs not being met.

To see just how complicated this task is, let us take a look at some children at risk:

> Carlton is eighteen months old. He lives with his mother and father, both of whom are twenty years old. To put it bluntly, both parents feel Carlton was a "mistake." Both parents feel resentful over being tied down. They can't afford to get out on weekends. Carlton's father works long hours at a gas station and wants nothing more than to eat dinner and watch television when he comes home. He ignores Carlton except to yell at him. Carlton's mother feels trapped and depressed. She has no friends, and sees little prospect of making any in the apartment building where they live. She blames Carlton and his father. She belittles Carlton when he "causes trouble" and ignores him the rest of the time.
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> Ella's family is large and a bit chaotic. At five, she has three sisters (two older) and two brothers (one younger). Her mother was married once before her present boyfriend, who is not Ella's father. Her mother tries her best. She works (at low paying jobs) and rents a little house in a run-down neighborhood. When her mother is at work, Ella is left at home on her own with her brothers and sisters and sometimes her mother's boyfriend. They have to stay inside the house because there are some "creepy" people on the street. Ella's family has lived in this house for seven months but still haven't really met the neighbors. Ella's mother is friendly, but she got such a cold reception when she spoke to the woman next door that she hasn't tried again since. There's a vacant house on the other side of the street that kids used to play in—breaking windows, writing on the walls, and so on. Drug dealers now use it to sell crack cocaine.
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> Anita is twelve—the oldest of six kids. She hates to go to school because she doesn't fit in. She is having trouble learning to read and do arithmetic. Her favorite class is home economics, but she only has that two days a week, so she skips school as often as she can on the other days. At home she helps her mother, who came from Mexico when she was fifteen and now at twenty-nine speaks only broken English. No one in Anita's family reads except her father's sister; but even she would rather watch television. Anita's junior high school has 1500 students and she feels lost there. There are a couple of nice teachers—like the woman who teaches home economics—but they're all so busy keeping order and doing the daily assignments that there's not time for much personal attention. Anita figures she'll stop going to school altogether when she's sixteen so she can stay at home and help her mother take care of the other children. Last month her 16-year-old cousin was killed in a gang shoot out.

> Three-year-old Juan's life came crashing down this past year. Things were pretty good before that. His mother stayed home to take care of him and his older brother while his father worked on the assembly line at the truck factory in town. But eleven months ago, the plant laid off 300 employees because of declining sales, and Juan's father was one of the people who got a pink slip. His father couldn't find another job, became depressed, and started drinking heavily. His mother found a job as a waitress and insisted that Juan's father take over the household and child care. He refused, saying that was her job. They argued and fought until finally he left to go live with his brother in Kansas City. Now his mother has filed for divorce. Juan has started wetting the bed at night, and he doesn't talk much. He's a sad boy.

All of these children are at risk. Their normal growth and development is threatened. Each story has its distinctive elements, however. Carlton is at risk because his parents reject him and, thereby, undermine his feelings of self-worth. Ella lives in a neighborhood that weakens her family's already marginal social existence. The unsupportive nature of her environment threatens her development. Anita needs all the help school can give her, but she gets lost in the shuffle at her large school and feels threatened by gang violence. She needs a lot of personal attention and encouragement if she is going to make it, but most likely, she will not get it. Juan's life has been terribly disrupted by an economic and social catastrophe not of his making and which even his parents do not really understand. When his parents separated, Juan was overwhelmed.

All these children are at risk, but the source of the problem is different in each case. For Carlton it lies in the poor quality of relationships within his family. He experiences rejection every day in every way. For Ella, the problem goes beyond her home to the neighborhood. Her family could make a go of it, and she would develop normally if the people nearby were a positive rather than a negative influence. Anita's problem is that she has trouble succeeding in one particular kind of situation, namely, school. She does fine at home, but her home life does little to prepare her for what is demanded of her at school. She could succeed in school if the school would encourage her, if she felt needed. But she doesn't, and that makes her give up trying. Juan's problem is related to the American economy. There is nothing really wrong with him, or even with his parents. The problem is that they live in a society undergoing economic disruption.

To deal with these children and their parents, we need to understand the sources of risk and opportunity in their social environments. We can profit from using the concepts of micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems developed in Chapter 2.

Risk and Opportunity in the Microsystem

The microsystem is the immediate setting in which the child develops. It includes people, objects, and events that occur directly to and with the child. Look around you, and see where the children are. They are at home, in play groups, in the neighborhood, and in schools. Each of these "places" implies the existence of a set of enduring roles and relationships—parents and children, leaders and followers, teachers and students. The shared experiences that occur in each setting provide a record of the microsystem and offer some clues to its future, because microsystems evolve and develop much as the children themselves do from forces within and without.

The setting "school" is very different in June than it was in September for the "same" children, who, of course, are themselves not "the same" as they were at the beginning of the school year. The setting of the family, as experienced by the first-born child, is different from that experienced by subsequent children. Naturally, children themselves change and develop as do others in the setting. We must remember that the microsystem has a life of its own—it develops, too.

It is also important to remember that Bronfenbrenner's definition speaks of the microsystem as a pattern *experienced* by the developing person. The child influences and is influenced by the microsystem. By his or her participation, the child has a say in the character of the microsystem, while at the same time the setting provides the child with ongoing norms, regularities, and experiences that come to be known as "normal" to the child. One of the most important features of child development is the child's emerging account of his or her experience. These narrative accounts—what is my life about? who am I? what and who matters?—combine to form a map of the world, a cognitive map of the world from a child's perspective.

The cognitive maps we carry around in our heads are the reality we live by and act upon. Shakespeare said it well in *Hamlet* (II, ii, 259): "There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Perhaps this idea was most clearly expressed by sociologist W. I. Thomas, who said: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572). The individual child constructs the microsystem as much as he or she is shaped by it.

The child's microsystem becomes a source of developmental risk when it is socially impoverished. That is, the child's development suffers whenever the microsystem is stunted, be it because of too few participants, too little reciprocal interaction, psychologically destructive patterns of interaction, or some combination of the three. A stunted microsystem results in a warped image of the world.

A microsystem should be a gateway to the world, not a locked room. Bronfenbrenner recognizes this when he offers the following proposition about microsystems and individual development:

> The developmental status of the individual is reflected in the substantive variety and structural complexity of the . . . activities which he initiates and maintains in the absence of instigation or direction by others. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 55)

The "product" of a healthy microsystem is a child whose capacity for understanding and successfully dealing with ever wider spheres of reality increases. Such a child learns to have self-respect and self-confidence, to be socially and intellectually competent. Let us take a brief look at three types of socially impoverished microsystems—microsystems that are too small, too one-sided, and too negative—and how they work against competence and self-esteem.

Small vs. Large

The U.S. Census Bureau has predicted that almost one out of every two children born in the United States since 1980 will spend at least some part of his or her first 18 years in a single-parent household. Many children start out in one parent families; others "lose" a parent along the way. This represents the extension of a trend toward single-parent households that began after World War II, and has gained momentum ever since. Add to this the fact that the proportion of single parents who maintain separate households—rather than incorporating with another, usually related household—has doubled in recent decades (Bronfenbrenner, 1975), and you can begin to see why we worry about these households producing family microsystems that are "too small" to meet the child's developmental needs.

We must recognize that this analysis is not intended as a moral judgment or a plea for legal sanctions. It is a statement about what children and parents need to be successful. A mother can be "single" (in the sense that she is alone in her childrearing efforts) even if she is married (if her husband is absent, unsupportive, or hostile). An unmarried mother may have the full support of one or more "partners" who help her function well as a person and as a parent.

As *individuals*, single parents may be excellent caregivers. But as *microsystems*, their households may be insufficient, unless they are augmented from the outside to produce a fuller, richer range of roles, activities, and relationships for the child to *use* in his or her development. In this respect, the single-parent household is part of a larger trend

toward an "emptying" of the family microsystem. Mothers are more likely to be working outside the home in the labor force (most do), kin are less likely to be involved in the child's day-to-day life because of geographic mobility and a trend toward privatism, age segregation in housing has increased (with old and young going their separate ways), and the many distractions of "modern life" pull parents away from the home and result in less time being spent in the kind of purposeful, cooperative activities that nurture child development (Garbarino, 1981c). A recent replication of a survey of youth done originally some 50 years ago found that adolescents now wish their mothers would spend more time with them, where once they seemed to take for granted that she would (Bahr, 1978). (They still wish that of their fathers, testimony to our continuing problems with the paternal role.) It is reasonable for us to worry about this "emptying" of the family microsystem because the available data suggest that it is linked to a variety of developmental difficulties (Bronfenbrenner, 1975). It is, thus, an aspect of sociocultural risk.

Conversely, microsystems made up of large numbers of relatives, neighbors, and friends provide an opportunity for rich and stimulating experiences. Children who have the benefit of growing up amidst a diverse set of relationships that span age groups, generations, and backgrounds enjoy a special social opportunity, whatever other risks may attend upon their situation. Thus, social risk and opportunity can exist side by side in the same environment. Indeed, as we noted in Chapter 2, the net result for a child's development depends in large measure on the accumulation of risk factors without compensatory forces at work.

Imbalanced vs. Balanced

One of the essential features of a healthy microsystem for the child is "reciprocity"—the give and take interaction that both respects and challenges the child, that stimulates and responds appropriately. When this essential reciprocity declines significantly, it jeopardizes the child's development. How does this happen?

It happens when the balance of power within the family microsystem breaks down. Typically, this means that the parent or parents seize complete control of the parent–child relationship and seek to dominate the child, thus thwarting his or her development. With an infant, this may mean taking a rigid stance with respect to feeding and other aspects of care giving. The "natural" and most developmentally enhancing way is for the infant to play an active role in shaping the parent's behavior, just as it is natural for the parent to influence the infant's behavior (Bell, 1968). This is a healthy family microsystem.

When the parent *refuses* to be influenced by the infant's tempo, rhythms, cycles, and spontaneous verbal and facial gestures, the essential principle of reciprocity is violated. Also dangerous is a parent who is psychologically unavailable to the child because of being incapacitated by drugs, alcohol, or psychiatric illness.

For the older child, the issue of reciprocity is found in the childrearing "style" adopted by the parent(s). Baumrind's studies (1979) of childrearing styles and their consequences for development provide an insightful look at how important the principle of reciprocity is to the family microsystem. She found that where reciprocity was maintained in day-to-day interaction—what she called an "authoritative" orientation—the child enjoys the greatest number of opportunities to develop social competence. Where the principle of reciprocity was systematically violated, the child's development suffered. An "authoritarian" style violated the principle of reciprocity by lodging excessive power in the hands of the parent and, thus, placed the child in a passive role. A "permissive" style inappropriately gave *carte blanche* to the child and his or her unformed drives and, thus, placed the parent in a passive role. Neither does justice to the child's developmental needs because both undermine the social richness of the family microsystem.

Consider an incident in which a 10-year-old child shows up at 6 o'clock when dinner was scheduled for 5 o'clock. The authoritarian parent might respond with, "You're late. Go to your room. There will be no supper for you!" When the child responds with, "But I . . . ," the parent interrupts with, "No but's. Go to your room." In contrast, the permissive parent might respond with, "Welcome home, dear, I'll cook your supper now." The authoritarian parent has not permitted the child to offer a response; the potentially useful process of bargaining and negotiating is short-circuited. The permissive parent, on the other hand, has not set the child's behavior against a standard and in that way has done him a disservice. Albeit for different reasons, the permissive style joins the authoritarian style in shutting off the developmentally enhancing process of negotiation, a quintessentially reciprocal process.

In contrast, the authoritative style emphasizes negotiation. The parent greets the child with" "It's 6 o'clock, and dinner was scheduled for 5 o'clock. You're an hour late. What's the story here?" When the child responds with, "But I was playing and lost track of time, then I had to help the other kids find the ball . . . ," the parent responds with, "I can see how you could lose track of time, but having dinner together is pretty important, and besides it makes more work when you're late. I suggest you find a way to keep track of time better, or you'll have to come straight home from school. Let's work on that. For tonight, your dinner is in the oven, I'll expect you to clean up your own dishes when

you're done." When the family microsystem is working this way, the balance of power between parent and child and standards and impulses is appropriate and developmentally enhancing. When it is too one-sided, it places the child at risk.

One source of imbalance in a child's microsystem may be found in the life history of parents. Parents with a history of emotional deprivation or abuse may have great difficulty acting in the child's best interests because they may be driven by deeply rooted and unconscious forces that disrupt the needed balance within the family microsystems.

For example, Selma Fraiberg (1975) used the concept of "ghosts in the nursery" to refer to the fact that the parent's behavior may be in response to his or her own unresolved childhood issues more than a response to the child before them. These ghosts from childhood must be "exorcised" through therapy before the parent is free to act appropriately with the child and thus restore balance to the microsystem.

Negative vs. Positive

The child's experiences in the microsystem color his or her whole view of the world. Children incorporate these experiences into their emerging concepts of themselves, the world, and their place in that world. The microsystem problems of "too small" and "too one-sided" are important, but probably the single most important microsystem issue is "affective tone"—the emotional climate. A negative tone can be expressed in the full range of microsystem behaviors, including what is said (or not said), what is done (or not done). A positive climate produces a kind of "social momentum" in the child, while a negative climate produces "social deadweight." Positive climate contributes to success in the world because it gives the child a reservoir of self-confidence or "ego strength" that is an important foundation for competence (McClelland, 1975). Negative climate makes the child vulnerable to being easily discouraged by everyday problems and turns the child away from full and satisfying participation in the world.

Coopersmith (1967) demonstrated that the microsystem plays an extremely important role in determining whether children experience their world and themselves in positive or negative terms. A nurturant, involved, and actively contributing parent tends to produce high self-esteem, while a passive, neglecting, and uninvolved parent produces low self-esteem. Much as the slogan "you are what you eat" conveys the notion that we become what is offered to us, so the statement "you are what you are shown about yourself by others" conveys the notion that children construct an image of themselves based on the feedback from significant others. This view of personality is in the classic tradition of

George Herbert Mead (1934) and others who argue that by defining the role a person plays, we go far toward defining the person. To rob a child of positive self-regard, either by deliberately deprecating a child and his or her accomplishments or by conveying a sense of worthlessness by neglecting the child, is to place the child at developmental risk and may constitute psychological maltreatment (Garbarino, Guttmann, & Seeley, 1986).

To develop a positive sense of self, the child needs warm, responsive, and active "partners." The microsystem can fail the child in many ways, but the most serious threat comes from neglecting parents who starve the child of emotional sustenance. These parents are likely to exhibit what Polansky (1976) calls "the apathy–futility syndrome." The elements of this pattern are a kind of emotional deadness, an unwillingness to initiate or respond to actions of the child, a pervasive sense of ineffectiveness, and a general unresponsiveness to the initiative of the child. The developmental threat posed by adults who suffer from the apathy–futility syndrome is that they are unable or unwilling to provide the intense, responsive interaction necessary for the adequate development of competence and self-esteem in their children. Rather, these care givers project a world view of passivity, depression, and rejection. None of the active encouragement needed to develop a personal reservoir of self-esteem and positive regard exists.

Like all personality variables, the apathy–futility syndrome needs to be understood in terms of actual behaviors. Burgess and Conger (1978) provided such behavioral documentation. They observed families interacting in their homes, both in unstructured interaction and in pursuit of several tasks provided by the investigators. The principal conclusion of these studies was that parents who abuse and neglect their children characteristically ignore positive behavior in their children, have a low overall level of interaction, and emphasize negative behavior. This is certainly a "social engine" well-suited to the task of producing psychologically damaged human beings.

This psychological starvation is bad for children. It is part and parcel of a broader risk: rejection. Children who are rejected are in trouble. This is the conclusion of Ronald Rohner's wide-ranging studies of the problem. Rohner (1975) examined rejection, its antecedents and consequences, in cultures all over the world. He found that across cultures, rejection is a kind of emotional malignancy, a psychological cancer that eats away at the individual's capacity for self-esteem, social competence, and hope. Rohner concluded:

> that parental rejection in children, as well as adults who were rejected as children, leads to: hostility, aggression, passive aggression, or problems with the management of hostility and aggression; dependency; probably

> emotional unresponsiveness and negative self-evaluation (negative self-esteem and negative self-adequacy); and probably, emotional instability as well as a negative world view. (Rohner, 1975, p. 168)

In support of the ecological perspective, Rohner also found that rejection increased when a child's care givers were isolated from the nurturance and feedback of interested others—kith and kin.

The environment of contemporary America contributes significantly to this problem. Drug and alcohol addiction incapacitates and isolates many family microsystems. Harsh conditions of life in many public housing projects—including the intersection of poverty and chronic violence—lead to widespread depression among mothers "left behind" to care for children (Kotlowitz, 1991). One study found that 50% of the mothers in one such setting were seriously depressed (Osofsky et al., 1991). This parallels findings from refugee camps in war zones (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991).

This is, of course, an issue that implicates the meso- and exosystems, and it is one we will consider shortly. At this point, suffice it to say that all three varieties of microsystem risk (too small, too imbalanced, and too negative) cannot be understood without looking at their antecedents and consequences in the meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. Just as parents guide and protect their children, the community is parent to all its families.

Risk and Opportunity in the Mesosystem

Mesosystems are the relationships between two or more settings in which the child is an active participant, such as school and home. The social richness of a child's mesosystem derives from the number and quality of these connections. At one extreme we have the case where the child is the only connection and the microsystems on both sides make incompatible demands; at the other, we have the case where there is total overlap between two or more settings and total agreement in their values. Mesosystem risk is defined first by the absence of connections and second by conflicts of values between one microsystem and another.

Weak vs. Strong Connections

A mesosystem is established at the point where a child first enters a new setting. This is what Bronfenbrenner calls an "ecological transition" (1979, p. 210). The two critical issues here are how this is done, and who

is involved. If, for example, the ecological transition is defined as a very positive event by the child's parents, if the child is well prepared for the new setting, if the child is accompanied by the parents or other familiar persons are found there, and if the new setting receives the child with enthusiasm, the child is on his or her way to a strong and developmentally enhancing mesosystem. In such a positive case the whole (the mesosystem) will be greater than the sum of its parts (the microsystems).

Negative vs. Positive Connections

The stronger, more positive, and more diverse the links between settings, the more powerful and beneficial the resulting mesosystem will be as an influence on the child's development. A rich range of mesosystems is a developmental opportunity; a poor set of mesosystems engenders developmental risk. When the microsystems work in concert—a strong mesosystem—the child benefits. In general, when they work in isolation or in opposition, the child is at risk. Perhaps the major exception to this "rule" occurs when one microsystem is so negative or weak that the child requires compensatory treatment. Even here, however, the mesosystem issue concerns the match of microsystems from the child's perspective.

The School-Home Relationship as an Example

All this is easier to see when we look at the school–home mesosystem. For some children, this mesosystem is strongly positive: There are many connections, and there is mutual support between the two settings. The child's parents are interested and involved in the school. The home trains the child to be comfortable and competent in dealing with the school's basic activities: reading, writing, and arithmetic. The home conveys a positive regard for written materials and the use of language in formal, problem-solving, and systematic question and answer sessions, organized around the solution of problems involving objects, quantities, and relationships. Children raised with this pattern are more likely to work to the fullest of their potential at school. This pattern might be called the "academic culture" (Garbarino, 1981b), and it is composed of what J. W. Getzels (1974) calls "language codes" and "value codes."

> The language code gives the child the categories for structuring and communicating this experience. The value code tells him what in his experiences is important. For one child the codes learned in the family and those

required by the school may be continuous; for another they may be discontinuous.

Recent work on the culture of literacy (McLane & McNamee, 1990) highlights this. McLane and McNamee have explored the way children learn to value "the communication of meaning through point" as the key to literacy. Their in-depth investigations reveal that children look to parents and others in their microsystems for role models concerning literacy. Those who have those role models (models of both language codes and value codes) come to school with a framework of skills, attitudes, and motives that prime them for the academic agenda. The home–school mesosystem arises naturally for these children.

Some children come to school well equipped to be students, whereas others are aliens to the microsystem of the school and find its requirements alien to their own experience. In a world such as our own, where academic success is important, to be an alien to the academic culture is to be at developmental risk. Failure in school sets one up for a whole series of socially and personally "risky" experiences, e.g., conflicts over rules, economic penalties, threats to self-esteem, and further alienation from the mainstream of cultural and social experiences that the society has to offer. Trouble with school is a major contributor to juvenile delinquency (Gold, 1963).

Beyond this issue, there is the question of how well school and home work together to provide a healthy balance of objective and subjective responses to the child, how well they complement each other. Getzels (1974) has written persuasively that one measure of a healthy social environment is the balance between "universalism" and "particularism" in the child's experience. Universalism is based on treating everyone by the same standards, particularism looks at each person individually.

> In the particularistic relationship the important question is *who* is involved; in the universalistic relationship the important question is *what* is involved. (Getzels, 1974, p. 223)

While home and family tend to emphasize particularistic concerns, schools tend to emphasize universalistic ones. However, for a child to experience a healthy balance of particularistic and universalistic concerns, school and home must work in concert; they must complement each other. Neither should be so extreme as to place the role of the other in jeopardy. Also, some children may need the school to provide a compensatory "dose," either of particularistic or universalistic orientation, if the home is unable or unwilling to do so. This is clearly a mesosystem issue. Too much particularistic treatment will undermine the child's ability to deal with the abstract and the bureaucratic world. Too much universalistic treatment will impair the child's ability to deal with genuine intimacy. The implicit "danger" of the family is typically that it will go overboard on the particularistic end; the "danger" of the school is that it will overemphasize the universalistic. While there is no hard and fast rule to judge these matters, it does seem clear that large schools, because of their inherent tendency to overemphasize universalistic orientations, pose the danger of psychically starving students, particularly academically marginal students (Garbarino, 1980d). Like the small family, where there is a high ratio of adults to children (Lieberman, 1970), the small school provides more opportunities for the reciprocal interaction that enhances development (Barker & Gump, 1964).

The school–home mesosystem is one of the most important in the child's life. When it is strong and positive, it provides the child with the opportunity to develop intellectually and socially, to become a more complete human being. When it is weak and negative, it burdens the child with conflicts of values, style, and interest. So burdened, the child is held back from his fullest development. In recent decades, schools have become more isolated from neighborhoods and other community institutions, and the demands for academic success have increased, and the stresses on families magnified. The potential for developmental risk related to the school–home mesosystem seems to have increased (Garbarino, 1981b). However, studies of intervention programs aimed at strengthening this mesosystem have documented that this goal can be accomplished (Bronfenbrenner, 1975). Efforts to do so bring us naturally to the exosystem.

Risk and Opportunity in the Exosystem

An exosystem is a setting in which the child does not participate directly, but which has an effect on the child through the meso- or microsystems. As noted earlier, one source of exosystem risk is the world of work, such as when the child's parents are so stressed or discouraged by their jobs that they are not inclined to participate in a nurturant, responsive, and reciprocal manner in the family microsystem. A second is when people make decisions in their official capacities that adversely affect the child's day-to-day experience, as when the school board closes a small neighborhood school in favor of a large isolated school that requires a bus ride. Many of the most important exosystem risks to children fall within these two categories: a parent's diminished ability to participate productively in the child's microsystem,

or people in institutional roles making decisions that adversely affect the child's microsystems.

One of the ground-breaking accomplishments of Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach is to highlight situations where the development of the child is significantly shaped by the actions of people with whom the child has no direct contact. Consider these two examples. First, because of fluctuations in the economy, a corporation board decides to shift operations from one plant to another, and hundreds of children are affected, either because their families are forced to move to a new location or because their parents lose their jobs. Second, parents who chronically abuse their children begin to attend Parents Anonymous group meetings and begin to be more nurturing to their children. Thus, discussions of exosystems involve both policy and program.

Stresses and Supports for Parents

Exosystems enhance development when they make life easier for parents, and undermine development when they make life harder for parents. Thus, exosystem opportunity lies in situations when there are forces at work outside the family on behalf of children and their parents. When child rearing "has friends in high places," the opportunities for children and parents increase.

At this point it is worth noting that the ecological perspective forces us to see risk beyond the narrow confines of individual personality and family dynamics (in the ecological approach, both are "causes" in the child's development *and* "reflections" of broader sociocultural causes). Recall the saying "if the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to treat every problem as if it were a nail." If we only think about children at risk in terms of personality and interpersonal dynamics, we will never see the many other avenues of influence that might be open to us as helpers or that might be topics of study for us as scientists. Our goal here as always is to make use of the ecological perspective as an imagination machine to open our eyes to new approaches.

Anti-child vs. Pro-child Institutional Policies and Practices

Meso- and exosystem risk come together in contrasting the socially enriched with the socially impoverished neighborhood. It is fitting that we set the stage for our discussion of macrosystem risk by briefly examining how the multiple functions of neighborhoods—as microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem—can exert a significant influence on children and their development. The neighborhood is the natural "ecological niche" of families, and it can serve as either a source of support or risk for the child.

Few concepts are so attractive and have so much feeling attached to them yet are so difficult to work with in a scientific way as is "neighborhood," and for this reason we will spend most of Chapter 8 examining its role in child development. The child acts as part of the neighborhood. Indeed, one definition of "neighborhood" is based on the walking range of a young child. It is thus a microsystem.

However, the complementarity of neighborhood and family is a mesosystem issue. The neighborhood is also a setting in which the parent participates independently of the child, and the quality of the support, encouragement, and feedback given by the neighborhood to the parent has an effect upon the child's development. The neighborhood, thus, also functions as an exosystem influence on development. A strong and healthy neighborhood enhances development by providing the kind of multiple connections and multiple situations for children that permit them to make the best use of their intellectual and social resources. Our point here is that the quality of the neighborhood depends in large part on how the community's economic and political institutions treat the neighborhood. Do they sustain it or undermine it?

All this has many important implications, two of which are worth noting here. First, it seems that many of the most important decisions people make that have an impact on child development are not *directly* about children. They are decisions about working, about residence, about budgets, about transportation, about housing, about civil liberties, about the whole range of things that shape the actual content and process of a child's microsystem. Second, these decisions reflect basic, cultural "blueprints" that describe what people understand to be "human nature" and "the way things are done," and they are heavily influenced by social history: by government stability and disruption, war and peace, and prosperity and economic collapse. This leads us to the macrosystem.

Risk and Opportunity in the Macrosystem

It should be clear by now that understanding the factors involved in producing sociocultural risk and in determining what its effects will be is no easy matter. It goes well beyond understanding individual personality, and even further than is implied in the notion of looking at the match of individual to situations. In fact, the issue of sociocultural risk goes directly to the heart of the culture and to the ideology of the society in which a given family, and therefore a child, is living.

Although we experience reality and construct it in the immediate settings in which interpersonal relationships take place (microsystems), and can extend our view to see the relevance of connections between settings (mesosystems) and the indirect influence of settings in which we do not ourselves participate (exosystems), many of the most important influences on our lives come from social, economic, and political changes that occur at the level of nations and whole societies. For example, World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War exerted profound effects on the day-to-day lives of nearly all Americans. General George Patton reportedly said, "War dwarfs all other forms of human activity into insignificance." While we may hate that statement, it does contain much truth.

Patterns of migration brought Blacks out of the South and into the North in response to World War I. In both World War I and II, women entered the work force primarily in response to the needs of the war machine. Thousands of children experienced father absence, on a temporary or permanent basis. The economic face of the nation was permanently changed. Many men and women saw so many new worlds that they were motivated to reconstruct their own. The experience of African-Americans in World War II helped precipitate the civil rights movement of the 1960s. These macro-events produced myriad technological changes that have diffused into day-to-day life. All these changes and many more are the result of macrosystem effects.

Bronfenbrenner thinks of macrosystems as cultural blueprints that underlie the organization of institutions, the assumptions people make about social relations, and the workings of the political and economic system. Two aspects of this definition are particularly important for our purposes.

The first is that this treatment of culture goes beyond simple description. That is, in specifying culture as the blueprint for society, we leave open the possibility that the blueprints may be "in error." Bronfenbrenner offers us the possibility of criticizing culture and society on the grounds that they impede human development. While this may seem self-evident, it does represent something of a departure from the way many social scientists think of culture.

Using the term "cultural relativism," many social scientists argue that all cultures are equivalent, that one cannot and should not criticize cultures as being humanly wrong since all cultures arise as a specific adaptation to circumstances (cf. Tulkin, 1972). Translating culture into the concept of macrosystem, on the other hand, raises the possibility that such consistencies may not be in the best interests of children and their development. This, as we shall see, is an important point.

The second and related aspect of Bronfenbrenner's definition is found

in his statement that macrosystem refers to consistencies "that *could* exist" (1979, p. 26). The ecological approach is intimately bound up with social policy, i.e., the decisions and principles guiding the behavior of public and private institutions. It necessitates a serious consideration of "social engineering" as a way of dealing with individual developmental problems. Naturally, this is of special relevance in the discussion of sociocultural risk, where the focus of attention is on problems in just those "consistencies in the form of lower-order systems" that do exist and have an adverse developmental effect on individuals. Thus, an ecological approach has a "moral imperative" attached to it; it both describes and prescribes. It tells us that to reduce risk at the most immediate level of the microsystem, we *should* consider changing things in the big picture. This means that the topic of sociocultural risk brings together the "helping" and "describing" traditions in human development. The meaning and implications of this moral and scientific approach to culture will emerge as we look at five examples of macrosystem issues implicated in understanding sociocultural risk.

Pluralistic vs. Totalitarian Societies

At the very start, we can look at the sociopolitical organization of the society in our efforts to seek the roots of sociocultural risk. The development of children, particularly their moral development, depends in part on the "political" structure of their experiences (cf., Almond & Verba, 1965). Children need a world that combines stability and diversity, consensus on basic principles coupled with alternative and competing expressions of those principles. Very young children need to form powerful attachments that provide the basis for prosocial motivation to develop. But once they have developed that basic prosocial motivation (to obey, to attend to rules, and to develop the rudiments of conscience), they need more, (Garbarino & Bronfenbrenner, 1976b). They need to be faced with moral dilemmas, but in a reasonably secure, nurturant, and supportive setting.

Two extremes, and therefore two dangers, are possible. On the one hand, there may be such a diversity of irreconcilable alternatives that the child cannot choose and at the same time avoid the hostility and alienation of those she chooses against. On an interpersonal level, Bateson (1972) has called such situations "double binds" ("damned if you do and damned if you don't") and linked them to schizophrenia. Children should be protected from these conflicts: They are unfair and developmentally threatening. On the other hand, where there is unanimity so complete that no choice is ever allowed and only a slavish obedience required, the child's moral development languishes.

One can imagine, for example, a society that irreconcilably pitted school and government against family. In such a situation, the child would be faced with an intense double bind. To remain loyal to the family would mean to estrange one's self from peers, from teachers, and in fact to place oneself in political jeopardy. To side with school and government would mean to make the intolerable choice of turning one's back on kin. Many totalitarian societies force this choice on children as a matter of course; Nazi Germany for one (Shirer, 1960). Democratic societies do not do so as a matter of policy, although such dilemmas may occur when there are irreconcilable differences between family and state. The situation is familiar to Native Americans, Latinos, and Blacks in the United States.

In contrast to the society in which there is irreconcilable conflict between family and state, there stands the society in which all social agents are unified in single-minded devotion. Here the developmental problem is not one of double binds but rather that the lack of diversity will impede higher order cognitive and moral development. For example, when church and state are under the same rulers (theocracy), such as occurred in Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini, there is unchecked absolutism, and moral sensibility languishes. Where there is no diversity, the child can too easily satisfy society's demands. This too stands in contrast to the democratic society in which a measure of social diversity necessarily exists, where there are competing allegiances that the youngster must sort out and in so doing learn to develop higher order thinking and judgment (Garbarino, 1968). The child learns to live by principle in the democratic society.

The available data suggest that the greatest danger to children's moral development lies in the totalitarian society that commands total allegiance to the state. This is manifested in the authority of adults, such as teachers and youth group leaders. One study of these data (Garbarino & Bronfenbrenner, 1976b) looked at the moral judgments of youth (12 years old) in countries with varying degrees of social and political diversity. At issue was the degree to which the youths' moral judgments reflected a balance of adult and peer influences as a function of whether the society was totalitarian or democratic. The study used the term "pluralistic" to refer to the middle ground between irreconcilably intense conflict on the one hand and the extreme absence of conflict on the other. In a pluralistic society, there are completing allegiances that operate within a common framework: a consensus on basic principles, agreement to the rules of the game, and appreciation for the need to spare individuals impossible choices as much as possible. The results of the study indicated that across both communist and noncommunist societies, the less pluralism a society manifested, the less balanced were

the moral judgments of the youth. The issue is one of totalitarian versus pluralistic societies, not necessarily one of political East versus political West—a distinction that has blurred in the 1990's.

What does this have to do with sociocultural risk? It tells us that when looking at macrosystem matters we should attend to whether or not the political culture of a society forces children and parents into intolerable dilemmas. It tells us that there are developmental grounds for supporting the "pluralistic society." Political freedom makes good sense developmentally. In fact, these developmental grounds have been illuminated in creative detail by White (1959).

White speculated that there is an inherent drive to master the environment and a natural "incongruity mechanism." That is, the human being thrives on "optimal discrepancy," a balance of the familiar and the different, of the known and the novel. Environments that provide the organism with this kind of optimal discrepancy serve to stimulate and enhance development. They provide the kind of richness human beings need. Thus, classic, philosophical traditions of democracy stand on firm scientific grounds. A democratic society—a pluralistic society—is in fact a healthy environment in which humans can grow. It offers them the greatest exercise of those characteristics (evaluating, deciding, and comparing) that are innately and particularly human. To deprive people of such a pluralistic environment is to damage their growth and development. Therefore, a nondemocratic social system—a macrosystem dominated by totalitarian influence—presents a sociocultural risk for those who live within it.

The developmentally enhancing character of a pluralistic ideology that values freedom of expression and guarantees human rights is evident vividly in the case of traumatized children and youth, particularly those growing up in war zones (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991). Such children and youth can travel one of two paths. The first is the path of "vendetta morality" and "the politics of revenge." Victims seek an explanation. Extremist ideologies offer an explanation and promise revenge (e.g., terrorism).

The second path is one of healing and a morality of forgiveness and caring. It comes when there is a political climate that encourages victims to "process" their experiences and seek positive and constructive expressions for their pain (e.g., by becoming a helper onself or by preventing future victimization).

The Economic System: Triumph of the Marketplace?

The economic system is one of the most powerful aspects of the macrosystem. It connects work, goods and services, and the social, biolog-

ical, and physical environments that more than anything else define the kind of life we lead. The type of economic system—for example, laissez-faire capitalism or state-run socialism—and a person's place in the economy—rich or poor, working or unemployed, superior or subordinate—have an enormous effect on one's relation to one's family, community, country, and oneself.

The American economy grew out of the free-market assumptions first advanced by Adam Smith, tempered by twentieth-century innovations of government intervention. Laws and regulations, taxes and government programs attempt to "fine tune" the economy so it works better and ensures the survival and minimum well-being of all Americans. How well is the economic system working to support our nation's children and families?

At the heart of this question stands one of the great political, economic, and social debates of our time. As we said earlier, human needs are constant and basic; societies much more "primitive" than ours have had long and happy histories with little of the "creature comforts" or technology so basic to our way of life. We can all easily cite the benefits of our economy: unprecedented material wealth for many, social and geographic mobility, rising health and educational standards, to name but a few. At the same time, we must ask about the costs of our system to people and to the environment. One way to consider this is in terms of the underlying assumptions that determine "how things are done" in the economy (Garbarino, 1988a,b).

For example, our economy is based on the principle of permanent growth as a necessary condition for progress. Growth constantly requires new markets, resources, changing demands, and an emphasis on consumption. As a cultural blueprint, this idea seems obvious, even indisputable. Yet a small group of economists question the wisdom of continual growth (Daly, 1973). Starting from the idea that the Earth is a finite environment, they see the optimal economy as a steady-state system, with basically fixed levels of population and economic output. As technology advances, productivity and time, rather than increased production, would be gained. The economy would strive toward stable levels of consumption and economic activity and *maximum* durability and quality of goods, leaving people the means and freedom to fulfill their lives more independently of the economic system. One can imagine—at least as a vision—a combination of advanced technology and cottage industry, as people devote themselves to satisfying labor and minimize unpleasant work. Our ecological situation, of course, would be much improved by a system based on stability and the sustenance of all life, rather than constant growth and the exploitation that it requires.

Another aspect of the economic macrosystem is the use of the profit

motive as a basis for economic decisions. Rather than directly considering basic human needs of consumption, satisfying labor, and human relatedness, our economy is based on the pursuit of profit. The distortions we suffer in unemployment, poverty, worker alienation, pollution, and stress, as well as the whole "malaise of affluence" (Lasch, 1978) are by-products of our economic status quo. Although the riches we have accumulated may be unparalleled, so are the problems and dangers from which we suffer. We cannot take only the good; our economic tree bears poisons along with its fruits—particularly for the poor.

Finally, the economic notion of "efficiency" as a basis for making decisions is rarely examined. In a time of scarce energy and jobs, common sense would argue that a more labor-intensive approach to production would provide work for more people by using less non-human energy. Yet the trend throughout the economy is toward increasing mechanization and automation that puts people out of work and requires massive amounts of non-human energy. The agricultural sector, for example, has "released" 25 million people from the farms of the United States since 1940 by utilization of machinery (Berry, 1977). Yet, agriculture has never been in a more precarious state than it is now, as farmers are forced to farm larger acreage and go deeper and deeper into debt to afford land and machines, while the topsoil which must sustain us *forever* is being depleted at an alarming rate because of the necessity of "mining the soil" to reap short-term yields. Moreover, food production is in the hands of fewer and fewer people, unemployment is a permanent problem, especially for those at the bottom of the society who need work most, and the quality of our food, if anything, is diminishing.

During the 1980s average income remained about the same for American families (after correcting for inflation). Conventional economic thinking would have us believe that this means America's families were holding their own. But that would be a serious distortion of reality. Income increased for the top 40% of American families, but declined significantly for the bottom 40%. Does that even out? Hardly. Every additional dollar for affluent families means little or nothing in terms of greater child well being. Each dollar subtracted from poor or financially struggling families translates into heightened risk for children.

More broadly, we as a society continue to believe that everything is for sale, that the bottom line is the only calculation that really matters. Human economic life includes both the "monetarized" (where money changes hands in the production and distribution of goods and services) and the "nonmonetarized" (where no money changes hands). When we move an activity from the nonmonetarized to the monetarized (such as when child care becomes a business on a pay as you go basis) conven-

tional economic thinking defines this as "growth" (because Gross National Product increases). If we step out of this macrosystem we can see this more clearly as simply moving the transaction from one accounting system to another (with no guarantee of equal or higher quality). All this is true, and yet we proceed as if conventional economic thinking really made sense for children and families (Garbarino, 1992).

The fact that these basic assumptions are not questioned testifies to the extent to which they are ingrained as a macrosystem. Market payoffs, rather than human concerns, dictate what is to be the structure of our economy. We take it all for granted despite the fact that so much of what happens in the economic realm affects parents and children in critical ways. It is precisely the way we *think* of our involvement in the economy as workers, consumers, investors, and taxpayers that keeps the problems from getting solved.

Individualistic Competition vs. Interdependent Cooperation

One of the clearest ways to identify the operation of a macrosystem is to consider what people take for granted. Particularly when comparing macrosystems, one finds that what is taken for granted in one society is disputed in another. American culture views independence and autonomy as a norm, as a positive goal towards which individuals should strive. It assumes that individual competition and independence are part of "human nature." This belief is so firmly fixed in our macrosystem that many of us would find it hard to consider an alternative. Trainers who run group process workshops often report that when given a task—any task—Americans "automatically" define it as a competition, with winners and losers.

We see dependency as basically pathologic, or at least immature (Rotenberg, 1977). Our culture denigrates interdependence and sees it as a form of weakness. Just to present the issue this way is to raise the question: Is independence a self-evident good, or is it only good as defined within a particular culture, a culture subject to criticism on the grounds of its effect on development?

Few characteristics come without cost. We need to look at the social benefits and social risks of our culture. Our individualistic culture gives us a sense of personal responsibility, a rationale for achievement, and a justification for success. It provides a justification for our social system, differentiated as it is by economic and social levels. It provides justification for the winners (although it keeps a kind of Sword of Damocles of future failure always fixed above their heads). This narrowly individualistic culture of ours provides a kind of freedom, a fresh air of individuality that collective societies cannot match.

On the other hand, it clearly implies—and often makes painfully obvious—that if success is a matter of individual virtue, failure is a matter of individual deficiency. The other side of individualism is alienation, a sense of estrangement, of isolation, and of being perilously alone (Slater, 1970). Many social philosophers have argued that it is in the interdependencies and interconnections of one's social life that one finds enduring sources of what is meaningful. This basically philosophical position has received increasing scientific support as survey data and other investigations have shown that interpersonally well-connected people are the happiest and most satisfied with their day-to-day existence (Campbell, 1976).

The fact that social connectedness and enduring social relationships are what keeps us going in life suggests that our individualistic culture, and the competition and denigration of interdependency it implies, place us at sociocultural risk. Our culture tends to say "every man for himself" while our nature as human beings says "no man is an island." The use of "men" here is significant. Women are generally more attuned to interdependency, rapport, intimacy, and connection as a basis for social relations and individual identity (Gilligan, 1982).

There is a real, enduring, and intense conflict here. This conflict has been identified repeatedly in social and historical analyses of our society, analyses that go beyond gender. Sociologist David Riesman called it "the lonely crowd"; Philip Slater discussed it in his book, *The Pursuit of Loneliness;* James Webb, an historian, saw it throughout our history as "the parabola of individualism." It means that we—even of men more than women—value individual autonomy and privacy so much that we are always threatened with social isolation. Even if women do not subscribe fully to this culture, male dominance means they must contend with it.

We seem to say that everyone should be on his own and free, without recognizing that the price for such independence is the risk of alienation, a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction, and a heightened vulnerability to depression. Who bears this burden most acutely? Children do. They pay the price because this network of values leading to social isolation and alienation undermines responsible parenthood. It is one of the central issues facing our society (Garbarino, 1981c). Altogether, our excessive and unrealistic valuing of independence sets us up for unhappiness, and our children for impaired development. For example, depression often comes from social dislocation and produces neglectful childcare (Weissman & Paykel, 1974). This depression results in part from the macrosystem.

Just as is the case in moral development, where pluralism is the key, the matter of competition, individual responsibility, and interdependence requires a balanced, or middle road solution. Without a notion of

individual responsibility and accountability, it is unlikely that one can develop sufficient "internal locus of control" (the belief that the individual himself rather than external forces determine the course of one's own life) to keep our kind of society going. Indeed the very cornerstone of our society is individual self-motivation and competition, with cooperation seen mainly as a means toward the goal of the individual's greater gain. On the other hand, without an appreciation for interdependence, and for the intrinsic worth of social connectedness, we are constantly in jeopardy of alienation and depression. Both of these are potentially serious social problems affecting parents, and therefore children. Dependency can make the individual unequipped to face the demands of our society, while extreme independence can make one unable to share life's joys and hardships with others.

That this is a macrosystem effect is demonstrated by the fact that it permeates all our institutional life. In schools we see it in the fact that individual competition—primarily for grades—is a corrosive force undermining the self-esteem and development of the majority of students who inevitably must be "losers" (Dreeben, 1968). Two sisters came home from school, one with an "A" and one with a "C." The mother punishes one. Which one? The sister with an "A." "If you're so smart," she says, "why didn't you help your sister get a "B"? "Unamerican!" you say—Yes, they're Hawaiian . . . they value cooperation above competition.

On a broader scale, we see the effects of it in our virtual inability to restrain commercial exploitation of children and of their parents (Garbarino, 1981c), all of which goes forward under the banner of "individualism." Advertisers have an "individual right" to play to children, while parents have an "individual responsibility" to counteract this advertising blitz that emphasizes materialistic gratification (and children an "individual right" to choose products).

We saw it clearly when we once wrote to several airlines and government officials to complain that during a snow storm, parents with young children (one woman was stranded with a five year old and an 18 month old for 47 hours in the airport) were forced to "compete" on an equal basis with adults without children for available flights and accommodations. When we wrote, we were told, "We can't give special advantage to one group of our customers over another." Indeed!

An individualistic ideology tends to produce antichild, antifamily policies and practices. We see this ideology in policies that permit unrestrained development of shopping centers, even where it is evident to all parties—perhaps even the developers—that the net result will be fragmentation of the community and its neighborhoods. All this is written in the American blueprint.

And all this represents sociocultural risk because it exposes the individual to values and experiences that undermine an important condition for healthy development, namely, social connectedness. One of the most bitter fruits of this "cultural poison" is violence, our next macrosystem issue.

Militarism

At any given time in the last three decades, millions of children have been growing up in war zones around the world (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991). According to UNICEF, most of the casualties in these wars are civilians—many of them children. These wars are often civil wars or wars of liberation. They usually employ antipersonnel weapons that kill indiscriminately.

Of course beyond the 40 or so small, chronic wars there are larger, more traditional conflicts. In the Gulf War of 1991 more than 100,000 Iraqi people were killed in a period of 8 weeks, and many tens of thousands more—many of them children—died in the months that followed due to war-induced disease and malnutrition. Allied forces—principally American war planes—systematically attacked the Iraqi infrastructure—sewage, water, electricity, bridges, etc.

What sustains war as a source of risk to children? One sustaining force is the macrosystem of militarism. Militarism is a set of beliefs and institutions that legitimatizes and profits from the use of armed forces to advance and protect national interests. The international armaments industry institutionalizes economic incentives to militarize public life and group conflict. Many countries divert a large proportion of their resources to military purposes. They then claim they cannot afford to meet basic human needs in the fields of medicine, housing, education, and nutrition. This must remain a shocking insult to those who seek to improve the well being of children. It is sociocultural risk at its worst.

"Normal" Violence and "Abusive" Violence

As we hope has become clear in this discussion of macrosystem issues, to speak of the macrosystem is to consider the meaning of "human nature." This is evident as well if we look at "normal" violence. Just as our culture sees individual competition as a fact of human nature, it tends to define violence as an inevitable and normal part of domestic relations (Goldstein, 1986). The use of violence and the approval of domestic violence is common in our society. The most recent and comprehensive study (Straus & Gelles, 1987) documents that among normal American families, domestic violence in some form is almost universal

(involving at least some hitting in 90% of the families surveyed), and serious assault occurs in some 15% of our families.

The very fact that we define only the most damaging and extreme forms of physical punishment as "abuse," and permit the rest to be classified as only "normal discipline" is testimony to the acceptance that violence has in our culture. This, too, is a macrosystem issue because violence figures prominently in the blueprint of our domestic and institutional life (e.g., "the marriage license as a license to hit"). It is, in fact, a normal part of our experience. Educators, clergymen, and police all approve of the use of physical force and corporal punishment in punishing children and youth (Parke & Collmer, 1975).

Few parents can conceive of—let alone implement—alternatives to the use of physical force in social control and discipline (Garbarino, 1977a). The incredulous or hostile response given to calls for domestic *nonviolence* is testimony to this. When Sweden's legislature reaffirmed and strengthened its opposition to the use of corporal punishment by parents with their children, the American press treated the action as a ludicrous bit of nonsense, much the way a racist responds to civil rights legislation. The parallel is illuminating. When psychologist John Valusek issued a booklet under the title "People Are Not for Hitting," he found that most readers "naturally" assumed that he didn't include children in that message. He had to add "And Children Are People, Too" before the message was clear to many readers. Violence in general, but particularly domestic violence, is deeply embedded in our macrosystem.

At the same time, there are grounds for believing that the use of physical force is not inevitable, that it is a cultural phenomenon, and that alternatives can and do exist. The same investigators who found such widespread support for and use of domestic violence found that the level of such violence rises in direct proportion to a host of predisposing social stress factors such as economic inadequacy, marital conflict, and personal inadequacy. Rather than being an inevitable expression of human nature, the use of violence is a culturally conditioned expression of distress. Desmond Morris made the following observation about domestic violence based on his look at nonhuman species:

> The viciousness with which children . . . are subjected to persecution is a measure of the weight of dominant pressures imposed on their persecutors. (1970)

Cultural support for violence as a norm represents sociocultural risk because it presents and legitimatizes a dangerous outlet for stress. Some other cultures do not legitimize this outlet, and they have less domestic violence (Korbin, 1981). Some social stress is inevitable, and when we provide an outlet that can easily escalate into physically and psychically damaging behavior toward children, we place children in general at risk and the children of distressed families in special jeopardy. Where we condone the slapping of one child, we inevitably increase the likelihood that another will be punched. Where we accept husbands slapping wives on the grounds that it is a husband's right, we make it almost inevitable that women *and* children will be battered.

The insidious thing about macrosystem effects is that they send ripples throughout the human experience. In supporting the "rightness" of normal violence, we set in motion a chain of events that inevitably places substantial numbers of children at risk. On the other hand, insofar as we are able to start a countermomentum of nonviolence, we may serve to protect children who find themselves in stressful circumstances. Domestic violence is one of the most poignant and pressing areas of sociocultural risk with which our society must deal. Recent evidence suggests that a growing number of parents are hearing this message and are moving away from "normal" domestic violence (NCPCA, 1990; Straus & Gelles, 1990).

Sexism and Racism as Cultural Issues

One of the important principles guiding our efforts to enhance human development states that we should encourage the best possible match between individual characteristics and social settings. As we noted before, the ecological definition of development involves the idea that the more differentiated one's conception of reality and the greater one's skill in mastering reality, the greater the fulfillment of individual potential. This definition of development argues that ideologies or institutions which unnecessarily or unfairly limit the opportunities of individuals are a threat to development. Such factors unnecessarily and unduly restrict the experience, and hence the development, of those affected. Two such factors are sexism and racism, because they oppose the goal of individual development and are not linked to *necessary* group identities. They narrow the range of *social* contexts to which *individual* characteristics must be matched.

As an ideology, sexism asserts that there are rigid, inherent, and inevitable group differences between males and females that are and should be the basis for the differentiation of activities among individuals (Maccoby, 1966). In its best form, it is a "separate but equal" approach to development. In fact, according to research from a variety of sources, it contributes a "separate but unequal" macrosystem effect. It forces females (and males, for that matter) into unduly and unnecessarily narrow choices of activity and exerts a depressing effect on their competence. As recently as the mid-1960s, research on occupational develop-

ment revealed that whereas young males name a very wide range of potential occupations—ranging from the close-to-home (policeman, doctor, and mailman) to the far-flung (spaceman, baseball star, and president)—young females, as early as four years of age, will restrict virtually all their choices to teacher, nurse, and mother (O'Hara, 1962). Things have changed somewhat since the 1980s, but sex-typing of activities and sexist discrimination remain strong. Clearly, this does an injustice to the diversity of interests and abilities that exist among females. Therefore, there are developmental grounds for seeing sexism as a source of sociocultural risk.

Sexism also forces males and females into roles and personality styles that may be difficult for them to maintain. It means that males who are temperamentally inclined to nurturant roles may assume such roles only with decreased self-esteem and a sense of failure. It means that females who are temperamentally inclined to adopt aggressive, athletic roles, for example, must cope with the role incongruity this implies—and perhaps social rejection. All of this flies in the face of the principle of matching individual characteristics to situations and is therefore developmentally threatening. Whatever *group* differences there may be (and there *are* grounds for believing that such average differences between the sexes do exist, Hutt, 1972) do not justify values and institutions that run roughshod over quite significant *individual* differences (Rosenberg & Sutton-Smith, 1972). For example, evidence from a variety of sources suggests that, on average, males and females routinely adopt different styles of communication in public and private settings; with males, using information is a competitive effort to establish dominance, whereas females talk more cooperatively to build connection (Tannen, 1990). Sexism would make this average into a fixed norm of conduct.

In the same manner, racism is a direct threat to development. By postulating racial differences in intelligence, moral character, and general competence, racism undermines the development of the children it defines as inferior—and even impoverishes the development of those judged superior (Tulkin, 1972). It places the "inferior" children at risk by creating a negative reality with which they must contend. It diminishes them. It has a demonstratively depressive effect on competence and contributes to a wide range of personality disturbances. Because it is a macrosystem effect, it permeates the institutional life of the society, and thus, forces its victims into extraordinary measures to cope. Even those who consciously reject it may find it lurking below the surface in their thoughts and feelings.

Attributing characteristics to individuals within a group presents a threat to the development of those individuals—particularly if they are cast in a negative light. There is almost always overlap between groups,

whether the differences are due to actual genetic differences (such as the height of Chinese vs. Bantu people) or discriminatory testing (such as when Jews, immigrating to the United States in the early 1900s, were judged to be intellectually inferior on the basis of IQ tests administered to them in English, which they did not all speak).

Human development proceeds *through individuals*, although aggregate differences can and do exist. "Isms" that limit and define the range of possibilities for groups have an inevitably adverse effect on individuals by disrupting the natural process by which individual and environment are matched to facilitate development. Science and ethics merge in rejecting sexism and racism. These ideologies are not consistent with the process of fullest human development.

Reducing Sociocultural Risk: Support Systems

When a team of aeronautical engineers set themselves to the task of writing up a set of blueprints for a bumblebee, they found that by all their best judgments, a bumblebee shouldn't be able to fly. Coming this far in our discussion of sociocultural risk may create the impression that successful human development must be impossible, given the hostile forces aligned against the developing child. It might seem as though there is an overwhelming conspiracy at the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrolevels to undermine and impair development. For some children this is exactly the situation, of course. The chronicling of risks to development is not the whole story, however.

The human being is notable for intelligence, resourcefulness, will, and adaptability. Intelligence and adaptability have served us well in adjusting to an incredible range of environments. Adaptability is our strength. It means that humans may live, if not thrive, in many environments that are purely and simply hostile. Children grew up in the concentration camps run by the Nazis in World War II. Amid chaos and despair, children grew and learned. In their report on these children and efforts to work with them, Freud and Dann (1951) report that the children clearly adapted to concentration camp life, even though it was an inhuman and inhumane situation. Their adaptation, which meant their survival and mental progress, is a testament to the strength of the human species. However, as Freud and Dann point out, that adaptation was not without cost. The children exhibited a variety of clinical symptoms of disturbed, if not warped, development. This point must be understood in looking at and evaluating sociocultural risk. The fact that humans *can* survive in the face of these risks should not be enough to excuse or

rationalize the threats that those risks present. In looking at children who survive socially and culturally risky situations, we must always ask, "At what cost?" "What might they have been in a more nurturant and supportive environment?" and "What of those who did not survive?" Also, we must recognize that there is great individual variation in the response to sociocultural risk.

A generation of research on sources of coping and resilience among children exposed to developmental risks (poverty, impaired parents, stressful environments, disabilities, racism, etc.) has identified the following as critical to the child's success (Lösel & Bliesner, 1990):

- Actively trying to cope (rather than just reacting defensively) and temperamental characteristics that engender positive relationships with peers and adults (rather than passive withdrawal).
- Cognitive competence (at least an average level of intelligence—in the sense defined by Sternberg as "componential intelligence" in Chapter 1).
- Experiences of self-efficacy (being good at something builds a reservoir of confidence and self-esteem that can sustain the child in other areas of his or her life and over time).
- A stable emotional relationship with at least one person (who may not even be a parent, but who is committed to and attached to the child and who thus gives the child a model of what it means to care and be cared for).
- An open supportive educational climate (to engage the child in "processing" and interpreting experience and teach skills).
- Social support from persons outside the family (to connect the child positively to the community and thus help the child access its available resources).

We can reduce the risk posed by social and cultural factors that are inimical to optimal development; we have already done so in some areas. We can reduce risk by social action and by the individual characteristics of the child and those who care for the child. To understand how this happens and how to facilitate this process, we need to understand more about how families work and how children develop (Chapters 4–6). Once we have made progress in these basic areas, we can proceed to examine the social environment in which these basic structures and processes of life operate (Chapters 8–11). As a prelude to these discussions, however, we can examine two examples of sociocultural risk reduction.

There are at least two sources of sociocultural risk that run through the various micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem problems discussed in this chapter. The first of these is "social impoverishment." Social impoverishment is the denuding of the child's environment of significant social resources. The second source of risk is "cultural impoverishment." Cultural impoverishment is a set of values or view of the world that undermines the characteristics on which competence is built. It may involve rationalizations for self-interest, values that benefit the individual at the expense of families, an ideology that is outdated and is no longer functional to meet the demands of a changed environment, a narrow and inaccurate view of child development, or values that otherwise seriously impair the child's ability to function in the required contexts of social life outside the family. Both these forms of impoverishment find their most significant expression in the day-to-day content and structure of formal and informal support systems in a family's environment.

A support system is a social arrangement that provides nurturance and feedback to individuals. One of the pioneering researchers and theorists in this field, Gerald Caplan, defines support systems as

> continuing social aggregates that provide individuals with opportunities for feedback about themselves and for validations for their expectations about others, which may offset deficiencies in these communications within the larger community context. They tell him (the individual) what is expected of him and guide him in what to do. They watch what he does and judge his performance. (Caplan, 1974, pp. 4–6)

Social and cultural impoverishment results when these support system functions are undermined, impaired, eroded, or destroyed. These destructive influences can come at the micro- meso-, exo-, or macrosystem levels. They can come because of attitudes or beliefs that cause people to isolate themselves from the community. They can come from institutional and social forces in the community that prevent these supportive relationships from forming and being maintained. They can come from a culture that poisons support systems by devaluing children and family life (Garbarino, 1981c). These support systems figure prominently, not simply in the day-to-day management of tasks and stress, but in the very creation of a meaningful existence. In his review of the data bearing on the "meaningfulness" of human experience, Campbell (1975) found over and over again that it is the *social* richness of individual experience that determines its meaningfulness—above and beyond material resources. Naturally, economic deprivation is a serious threat to the human being. But it is the *social* deprivation that accompanies economic poverty which is responsible for its truly devastating human consequences. Being poor is quite different from being impoverished. The former may exist along with social affluence, while the latter implies a total denuding of the environment of the human necessities of life.

To speak of sociocultural risk as it applies to children is to look at how

the essential functions of the parent are supported, encouraged, supplemented, and reviewed by people with a long-term investment in the welfare and well-being of the child. A truly poor child is one whose parents are left to their own devices, particularly when those devices are too limited for the difficult task of rearing a child. A poor child is one who is unprotected. A rich child is one whose life is full of diverse and enduring relationships and whose parents are similarly involved in an interlocking web of supportive, nurturant, and concerned relationships. The higher the personal risk of the child, the greater the importance of sociocultural resources. The principal task for the community is to know how socially well-fixed their families are and to proceed accordingly. The community needs to recognize positive forces where they exist naturally (and then leave them alone) and to learn how to generate and sustain them where they do not exist already. Community development is inseparable from reducing sociocultural risk in this sense. A prochild ideology is the foundation for a caring community.

Where are we to look for a macrosystem model for a caring community? One useful source is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adapted by the United Nations in 1989, after years of discussion, the Convention sets out the basis for an international pro-child ideology.

The Convention sets out a foundation for a caring community by specifying a child's rights to be cared for, nurtured, protected, and respected—in times of war and peace, among the rich and the poor. It also sets out a mechanism for assessing how well each society is doing in providing opportunities and reducing risks for children. Each country is to submit status reports to an international oversight committee. These reports should reveal areas of improvement and deterioration in efforts to guarantee the rights of children. For anyone concerned with the well being of children it is a marvelous accomplishment.

However, at the time of this writing, the United States remained one of only a handful of countries around the world (ironically, Iraq among them) that has refused to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The sticking points? One is that we as a society reserve the right to execute juveniles. More broadly, perhaps we do not care enough about children and meeting their needs as a matter of the highest national priority.

The ecological approach used to organize our discussion clearly directs our attention to many points at which intervention is possible. If we think of the task as one of weaving a strong social fabric around the child and parent, the task becomes more comprehensible. The pressing need is to establish an effective partnership between formal and informal support systems so that each child is protected and nurtured by

both, directly as in the case of the small school, and indirectly as through the child's parents and primary care givers. The principal implication of our discussion of sociocultural risk is that this wondrous human child can and will become a competent person, if we only give it a chance. Against the many hostile forces chronicled in this discussion of sociocultural risk stands the child's own innate drive to master and succeed in the world, the parent's love and commitment to aid the child, and the community's motivation to care for all its children. The constant challenge to professionals and lay people alike is to help the constructive forces overcome the destructive ones.

RESEARCH CAPSULE

One clear and heartbreaking example of risk to development is child abuse and neglect. Scientists have looked at many different factors associated with child abuse in attempts to understand and prevent it, from the psychological attributes of the parents and child to the sociocultural home environment of the family.

One important study (Burgess, Anderson, & Schellenbach, 1980) examined the social interaction of abusive, neglectful, and control families. All families were drawn from similar social backgrounds: rural, poor, with parents averaging about ten years of education. By observing families performing simple tasks and engaging in discussions together, the researchers were able to score frequency of positive and negative communications and the types of sequences families engage in. The behaviors were scored by trained observers using a Datamyte 904 data collection system. This is a portable keyboard with number and four letter keys. Coded behaviors can be recorded and stored in computer format.

Observational research relies on accurate recording of phenomena as the basis of trying to understand it. Observations can be done in the laboratory or in naturalistic settings, and they can be done with or without the knowledge of the subject. The present study is an example of a structured naturalistic observation in which the researchers provided topics for interaction and then passively observed the families. The findings indicated that there is less interaction in abusive and neglectful families than in the control group. Both the abusive and neglectful families are less positive, more negative, and are more likely to reciprocate negative behavior than positive exchanges when compared to the control group.

The investigators also discuss demographic and family characteristics associated with patterns of abuse. Low socioeconomic status, single parenthood, large families, and particular child characteristics such as physical, intellectual, or behavior dysfunctions all are associated with high levels of abuse.

An intervention strategy aimed at increasing the positive interactions within abusive families is reported. The limited benefits suggest that while home-based skills training is possible, a more practical and effective strategy would involve the encouragement of natural helping networks to combat abuse and neglect among isolated, needy, and troubled families.

PRACTICE CAPSULE

Preschool education has been proposed as an effective and practical method for enhancing the development of young children. Public-funded preschools attempt to provide less advantaged youngsters with opportunities that are available to middle-class children at private nursery schools. Often preschool programs try to involve parents in their child's activities, both by inviting parents to the preschool and by making home visits. This is in the hope of establishing a strong home–school mesosystem from the beginning, making parents more aware and disposed toward helping their children to learn.

Varying approaches to preschool education exist; a central problem is the evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs. An example of one preschool program which has been thoroughly evaluated is the Perry Preschool Project. Based in a Ypsilanti (Michigan) neighborhood, the study followed 123 children who were three years old in the early 1960s. All of the subjects were Blacks from low SES families who had scored below average on the Stanford–Binet Intelligence Test. Fifty-eight children attended preschool for two years, 65 did not. The two groups were matched on personal, family, and demographic characteristics.

The curriculum at the Perry Preschool emphasized the child's cognitive developments and the strength of the family–school mesosystem. The student–teacher ratio was 6 to 1, and there was a weekly home visit in which parents were encouraged to aid in their children's development. The student's progress in school was evaluated and compared annually. By the end of the fifth grade, the two groups differed significantly on academic achievement. The students who had attended the preschool scored over a full grade level above the non-preschool children in reading, language, and arithmetic on the California Achievement Test. In fact, 49% of the preschool group scored at or above the fifth-grade level, versus only 17% of the children without the preschool experience. In addition, the preschool children had a lower rate of repeating a grade and a lower arrest record than the control group. The investigators estimate that in 1979 dollars, the one-year program cost $5,984 for each child and saved the public $14,819 for each child in reduced remedial education and social interventions.

Studies of preschool programs conclude that preschool succeeds in producing gains in academic, social, and health status for children and their families. Replications of this analysis throughout the 1980s continued to support this conclusion; early childhood education can exert a major positive influence. However, in the 1990s, as conditions have worsened for high-risk poor families, there is growing concern that this form of intervention is not sufficient to deal with the deeply rooted problems of the "underclass" (Halpern, 1991).

FOR FURTHER READING

Garbarino, J., & Gilliam, G. (1980). *Understanding abusive families.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 263 pp.

This book examines child maltreatment as a developmental and ecological issue. It begins with a discussion of the nature and definition of abuse and the

social context in which it is generally found. Family norms about childbirth and childrearing are then discussed with regard to risks and opportunities for bringing families closer together. Abuse is seen as an outgrowth of social isolation where parents lack the resources and support to effectively care for children. This book is an example of the applied work that can be done using the human ecosystem model.

Garbarino, J., Kostelny, K., & Dubrow, N. (1991). *No place to be a child: growing up in a war zone.* New York: Lexington Books, 177 pp.

This book explores the impact of war on children. It draws on field work in five war zones: Cambodia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, the Middle East, and inner city Chicago (where the gang wars put children in a combat zone). It examines the cultural and societal issues we face in seeking peace for these children within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Havighurst, R. J. (1962). *Growing up in River City.* New York: John Wiley, 189 pp.

An early classic in longitudinal studies of normal development, this book reports a 9-year study of adolescence and young adulthood. It was begun in 1951 when the subjects were in fifth grade and followed them until they were around 20 years old. The basic question the study asks is: What are the influences on these children's development, and how can we account for their success or failure as they embark on adult roles?

The children and their communities are studied together. The human ecosystem, from family to community agencies to social class difference are all considered together in their influence on the children. The book discusses the subjects' childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, stressing the continuity of life patterns and the sociocultural influences on their development.

The book concludes with a review of the data and suggestions that this typical American town could enact to enhance the maturation of its children. These include more options and opportunities for the less successful and alienated students, increased possibilities for work experience, and preparation for the many girls who leave school for early marriage. *Growing Up in River City* is an easily readable and fascinating book, for its inside look at a time gone by and at the universal process of maturation in social context which produces human beings.

Kotlowitz, A. (1991). *There are no children here.* New York: Doubleday.

In this book Alex Kotlowitz presents the lives of two boys growing up in a crime-ridden public housing project in Chicago. The two boys—brothers—struggle to overcome the odds against them—poverty, violence, racism. It is a moving account.

Sale, K. (1980). *Human scale.* New York: Coward, McCann, & Geoghegan, 558 pp.

A review of society, politics, economics, and community from the perspective of scale. Sale's thesis is that any institution, from school to families to government, will function best at an optimal size. Person-to-person interaction and understandable levels of complexity are important for the effective functioning of organizations, and this book argues that many current social and interpersonal problems share the common root cause of inflexible, oversized, and exploitative institutions which fail to address human needs. Numerous ideas are put forth describing various institutions designed "to the human scale," meeting the needs of children and families and of society as a whole.

Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don't understand.* New York: Ballantine Books.
Tannen is a linguist. She presents an analysis of male/female communication differences as a matter of different cultures—masculine culture with its emphasis on competition, hierarchy, and independence; feminine culture with its emphasis on cooperation, intimacy, and connectedness. This book makes a good comparison for Carol Gilligan's classic *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), which is a "must" for those interested in gender and sexism.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

1. In what ways can a family microsystem in which both parents work full-time be a risk to a child's development? In what ways an opportunity?
2. Negotiation is described in the chapter as a characteristic of authoritative parenting. Review how this differs from authoritarian and permissive styles of parenting and consider some risks to development in the latter two. Is the superiority of the authoritative style universal and absolute? Can situations require an authorization or permissive style?
3. In this chapter we discovered the home–school relationship as one example of a mesosystem. What are some other important mesosystems for the child, and what are their risks and opportunities to development? What are some mesosystem problems that might arise? How might we avoid or prevent these problems?
4. What are some ways to counteract the risks of the exosystem? Can families better serve themselves individually or by banding together in the community in the face of exosystem risk?
5. The chapter discussed several examples of macrosystem risk. Think about some of their causes and the reasons they are so hard to overcome. What might be some ways of lessening their effect in our society?
6. Consider the concept "support system." Describe support systems at each level of the human ecosystem. What are some of the important systems for children? for parents?